

# Landscape and Visual Appraisal

North Hemel Hempstead

December 2019

## DOCUMENT HISTORY

Project Number: 19.036		Document Reference: BMD.19.036.RP.001			
Revision	Purpose of Issue	Originated	Reviewed	Approved	Date
-	Local Plan Examination - Evidence	SR	JJ	RW	06.12.2019

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1 Bradley Murphy Design Ltd. (BMD) has been appointed by Pigeon Investment Management Ltd on behalf of Pigeon (Hemel Hempstead) Ltd to undertake a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) to inform the iterative design process and form part of the evidence base to support the allocation of the North Hemel Hempstead Broad Location (hereafter referred to as 'the Site' as illustrated on **Figure 1: Site Location and Study Area at Appendix A**) as part of the St Albans Local Plan Examination for a proposed mixed use urban extension to Hemel Hempstead.
- 1.1.2 The North Hemel Hempstead Broad Location is identified under Policy S6 iv of the St Albans Local Plan Publication Draft for the provision of a major urban extension of Hemel Hempstead comprising of the delivery of a minimum of 1,500 dwellings and associated infrastructure. Pigeon Hemel Hempstead Ltd are the landowners of the southern part of the NHH Broad Location Site and are working with neighbouring landowners to bring forward the development of the Site.
- 1.1.3 An appraisal of the following has been undertaken to understand, define and record the context, character, setting and sensitivity of the Site (see **Appendix A Baseline Figures** and **Appendix B Viewpoint Photographs**) in order to consider its capacity and that of the surrounding landscape and visual resource to accommodate the nature of development proposed:
- planning policy and guidance of relevance to landscape and visual issues;
  - key characteristics of the landscape character associated with the Site, including a review of published National & Local Landscape Character Areas; and
  - likely views of potential development on the Site from residential properties / settlement and publicly accessible areas including public rights of way and the road network.
- 1.1.4 Following the baseline study and on consideration of the findings, a **Landscape Analysis / Strategy Plan** has been produced (see **Appendix A**), which illustrates and summarises the recommendations of this LVA. Consequently, elements of the initial landscape appraisal and subsequent landscape strategy have been integral to the iterative design process used in the shaping of the conceptual masterplan for the North Hemel Hempstead Broad Location.
- 1.1.5 Subject to adherence with the requirements of: relevant planning policy; applicable recommendations and guidelines provided by the Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment and the Landscape Character Typology for the East of England; and, the recommendations outlined in this report for suitable assimilation of development into the Site, it is considered that this Site has the capacity to accommodate the nature of development proposed.

## **2. POLICY AND GUIDANCE**

### **Overview**

- 2.1.1 This section provides a summary of the planning policy relevant to landscape and visual issues. A detailed review has been undertaken of all relevant policy and guidance at a national, regional and local level, as illustrated on **Figure 3: Planning and Environmental Designations** at **Appendix A**.

### **National Context**

- 2.1.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2019) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and provides a framework within which the applicable local council should prepare their local and neighbourhood plans. The NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions.
- 2.1.3 The NPPF sets out three overarching objectives (Economic, Social and Environmental) in order to achieve sustainable development. These objectives are interdependent, need to be considered in mutually supportive ways and should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans and the application of the policies set out in the NPPF. The NPPF also notes the importance of planning policies and decisions in playing an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions - which should respond to local circumstances, reflecting local character, needs and opportunities of each area. Those policies relevant to this LVA are:
- Chapter 8 – Promoting healthy and safe communities;
  - Chapter 12 – Achieving well-designed places;
  - Chapter 13 – Protecting Green Belt land;
  - Chapter 15 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

### **Local Planning Policy**

- 2.1.4 The Site is being promoted for allocation under the North Hemel Hempstead Broad Location Policy S6 of the emerging St Albans & City Local Plan 2020 – 2036 and therefore is considered against the policies and requirements of the emerging Local Plan, rather than the existing saved policies from the City and District of St Albans Local Plan Review, 1994. Whilst the emerging Local Plan Policies take precedence, the relevant existing saved policies have been considered below.

### **Emerging Policy**

#### ***St Albans City & District Local Plan 2020 - 2036***

- 2.1.5 The Site lies wholly within the administrative boundary of St Albans District Council on the district boundary with Dacorum. The new Local Plan will provide the strategy for the growth of the

District to 2036 and beyond, defining the nature and location of development. The emerging St Albans City & District Local Plan 2020 – 2036 was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in March 2019 and, whilst not yet adopted, forms a primary consideration as part of this LVA due to the Site being brought forward under the emerging Local Plan. Once adopted, the Local Plan will be the starting point for consideration of all planning applications within the District. Emerging policies that are of relevance to this LVA are:

*Policy S1: Spatial Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy*

Policy S1 outlines the approach to new development within the district, giving priority to development proposed within the cities, towns and main urban settlements excluded from the Green Belt (Category 1 and Category 2 settlements). Whilst Hemel Hempstead is a town currently within the Dacorum District, St Albans policy S1 acknowledges that “expansion into the District is planned”.

*Policy S2: Development Strategy*

The Government figures for St Albans’ Local Housing Need, the extent of the Green Belt covering the whole of the rural part of the District and the lack of available brownfield land, create exceptional circumstances that justify the release of land from the Green Belt for major development in sustainable locations.

Policy S2 outlines the development strategy where all category 1 and 2 settlements within the District will be expanded through major urban extensions at ‘Broad Locations’ for development. The Site forms the North Hemel Hempstead Broad Location identified under Policy S6, where the exceptional circumstances required to justify Green Belt release for development exist.

*Policy S3: Metropolitan Green Belt*

Under the Emerging Local Plan, the Green Belt boundary would be changed to remove the central and western edge of the Site from the Green Belt to enable its allocation for development as part of the North Hemel Hempstead Broad Location, where exceptional circumstances exist for Green Belt release for development. The area along the north east edge of the Site will be retained as Green Belt for amenity purposes, accommodating new green infrastructure and the addition of new parkland.

*Policy S6: Broad Locations for Development*

The Site is identified in the emerging Local Plan as a designated ‘Broad Location’ for development to contribute to meeting housing needs of the District over the plan period and beyond. The Broad location and revised Green Belt boundary (within the St Albans District area) are illustrated on **Figure 3 at Appendix A**.

Policy S6 iv North Hemel Hempstead Broad Location sets out a series of specific policies which future development will be required to deliver. Of these policies, the ones relevant to landscape and Green Belt include:

- Masterplanned development led by the Council in collaboration with Dacorum Borough Council, local communities, landowners and other stakeholders;
- Strategic and local public open space, including managed woodland and ecological network links;
- Countryside access links including improved off-road paths (rights of way) and links to a community food zone retained in the Green Belt;
- A substantial new Country Park providing facilities for new and existing communities and a permanent green buffer to Redbourn;
- Retention of important trees and landscape features; and
- Recreation space and other community facilities, including health provision.

The objective for the North Hemel Hempstead Broad Location is to provide a major urban extension to Hemel Hempstead with the delivery of a minimum of 1,500 dwellings, with the delivery of approximately 1,000 dwellings continuing beyond 2036.

*Policy L23: Urban Design and Layout of New development*

The aim of Policy L23 is to ensure all new development responds positively to the environmental context and be efficient in the use of land. Of relevance to landscape and visual issues, the policy states “development must integrate well with existing environmental and urban character, including reflecting landscape context and adjoining urban structure and growth”.

*Policy L28: Green Space Standards and New Green Space Provision*

New development must provide a quantity of new open green space provision based on the forecast population in accordance with the standards outlined in Policy L28. Priority provision at the Broad Location for North Hemel Hempstead includes: playing pitches for adult and junior football, junior rugby and cricket, strategic play, parks and gardens and allotments.

*Policy L29: Green and Blue Infrastructure, Countryside, Landscape and Trees*

Policy L29 outlines the requirement for the necessary Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) to be undertaken on proposed development sites where they constitute major development - or have the potential to have a significant effect on the local landscape - in order to preserve and, if possible, enhance the character of the landscape. These should be supported by any landscape surveys on existing features such as trees and woodlands, which are present within the North Hemel Hempstead Broad Location.

## **Existing Policy**

### ***City and District of St Albans District Local Plan Review, 1994***

- 2.1.6 St Albans District Council (SADC) published the St Albans District Local Plan Review in 1994. The Council are currently in the process of preparing their new Local Plan (see Emerging Policy

below) however, in the meantime a number of saved policies from the Local Plan remain operational and a material consideration for all planning applications within the district. The saved policies form part of the Development Plan for St Albans, whereby development proposals should be decided in line with the Development Plan.

2.1.7 The saved policies of relevance to this LVA are:

*Policy 1: Metropolitan Green Belt*

The site lies within land designated as Green Belt, in the countryside surrounding Hemel Hempstead and St Albans. The Metropolitan Green Belt designation covers the whole of the rural part of St Albans District. The 'saved' Local Plan policy states "except for development in Green Belt settlements referred to in policy 2 or in very special circumstances, permission will not be given for development".

Where the council grant permission for very special circumstances, new development within the Green Belt shall integrate with the existing landscape.

A separate Green Belt review has been undertaken supporting this LVA, assessing the contribution the Site makes to the five Green Belt purposes, according to the NPPF (February 2019) (see chapter 5)

*Policy 69: General Design and Layout*

The purpose of this policy is to guide the quality, design and layout of all new development to ensure an adequately high standard. This policy outlines how the context should be taken into account as part of the design process – regarding the scale, character and choice of materials for new development – to ensure it relates to its surroundings.

*Policy 70: Design and Layout of New Housing*

The design of new housing developments is a key consideration of the District Council. This policy sets out a series of objectives that new developments must meet to promote a high standard of design and layout.



*Policy 74: Landscaping and Tree Preservation*

Trees and woodlands are particularly important features in the landscape of the District. The Site features hedgerow field boundaries, containing mature trees that contribute to the sense of enclosure. The purposes of policy 74 is to protect existing trees and woodlands which contribute to the amenity of the area. The Council will also seek the addition of new landscaping as part of new development, in order that the quality of the environment in the District is maintained and enhanced.

*Policy 97: Existing Footpaths, Bridleways and Cycleways*

The Site features and is crossed by public footpath Redbourn 011. Policy 97 states “the District Council will resist applications for development which would result in the loss of definitive rights of way”.

*Policy 109: Scheduled Ancient Monuments*

The Audrey’s Camp is a Scheduled Monument located approximately 1km from the Site’s eastern boundary. Policy 109 is aimed at ensuring any development likely to have an adverse effect on a scheduled monument will be refused on archaeological grounds. From testing within the field, there is no intervisibility between the Site and the Scheduled Monument due to the appreciable distance and extent of intervening vegetation and landform. Therefore, any likely effects will be negligible (see **Viewpoint 8** at **Appendix B**).

### 3. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

#### Existing Landscape Character Baseline

3.1.1 Published landscape character assessments relevant to the Site and study area have been reviewed as part of this LVA. These assessments comprise:

- *National Character Area 110: Chilterns*
- *Regional Character Areas: East of England Landscape Framework*
  - *Wooded Chalk Valleys LCT;*
  - *Wooded Plateau Farmlands LCT;*
  - *Settled Chalk Valleys LCT.*
- *District Character Areas: Hertfordshire Country Council Landscape Character Areas*
  - *LCA 94 – Buncefield Plateau;*
  - *LCA 95 – Revel End Plateau;*
  - *LCA 96 – Upper Ver Valley;*
  - *LCA 124 – Gaddesden Row.*

3.1.2 The published assessments provide a hierarchical appraisal of the character of the Site, its surroundings and the wider study area through a recognised process of landscape characterisation.

3.1.3 It should be noted that there are often subtle differences between and within individual landscape character areas that can give rise to variations in both actual and perceived quality, condition, value and susceptibility to change. Furthermore, boundaries between character areas do not always follow recognised features within the landscape such as rivers, settlement edges or field boundaries. In these cases, the boundaries between character areas should be treated as transitions where there is a gradual change in character as is often the case with landscapes at the national and regional level.

#### Landscape Character at National Level

3.1.4 Natural England has divided England into 159 distinct natural areas referred to as National Character Areas (NCAs). The boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape, rather than administrative boundaries and each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity.

#### **NCA Profile 110 Chilterns**

3.1.5 The Site falls wholly within NCA 110: Chilterns<sup>1</sup>, it is considered that, whilst the character assessments provided at a national level inform the context for regional, district and local character assessments, they do not provide a sufficient level of detail appropriate to the nature

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<sup>1</sup> Natural England (2013), NCA Profile 110: Chilterns  
BMD.19.036.RP.001

of effects likely to arise at a local level as a result of the scale and size of the proposed development. Therefore, these character areas were not considered further as part of the LVA.

### **Landscape Character at Regional Level**

- 3.1.6 A Landscape Typology for the East of England has been undertaken by 'Landscape East' ([www.landscape-east.org.uk](http://www.landscape-east.org.uk)) which draws on a range of data including local Landscape Character Assessment, Historic Landscape Characterisation, biodiversity, and rural settlement datasets as well as data generated through consultation. At a regional level, the Site falls within the Wooded Plateau Farmlands Landscape Character type (LCT) and Wooded Chalk Valleys LCT, as illustrated on **Figure 2 at Appendix A**.
- 3.1.7 The other LCT's (including the Settled Chalk Valleys) that lie beyond 1km of the Site have not been included in the baseline as any likely effects would be negligible, due to the appreciable distance and / or lack of intervisibility with and influence from the Site, as a result of intervening topography, transport infrastructure and / or vegetation.

#### **Wooded Plateau Farmlands LCT**

- 3.1.8 The northern part of the Site is located within the Wooded Plateau Farmlands LCT, a predominantly settled, enclosed landscape with frequent ancient woodlands - associated with a rolling, undulating glacial plateau, dissected by numerous shallow valleys.
- 3.1.9 Despite its settled character this landscape is rural and tranquil, often affording a sense of remoteness and continuity. This is lost in some locations close to larger settlements and roads, or where there are pylons present, forming visual detractors.
- 3.1.10 Key Characteristics and distinctive features relevant to the Site and its local context include the following:
- *Rolling landform on a dissected plateau;*
  - *Network of ancient hedgerows;*
  - *Primarily arable land use;*
  - *A wooded landscape with patches of ancient woods and copses.*

#### **Wooded Chalk Valleys LCT**

- 3.1.11 The southern part of the Site is located within the Wooded Chalk Valleys LCT, a landscape of steep sided valleys which penetrate the surrounding upland plateau, characterised by narrow valleys and seasonal watercourses.
- 3.1.12 Key characteristics and distinctive features relevant to the Site and its local context include the following:
- *Steep sided, narrow valleys;*
  - *Localised patches of calcareous grassland;*
  - *Sunken lanes;*

- *Species rich mature hedgerows;*
- *Mixed land use of arable and pastures along the valley floor.*

### **Landscape Character at County / District Level**

- 3.1.13 The Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment<sup>2</sup> describes landscape character at a local authority scale and evaluates the southernmost part of the County. The subsequent Landscape Character Area statements provide a baseline inventory and description of the county's landscape character types (LCT) and areas (LCA). The Site is located within **LCA 95 Revel End Plateau** and **LCA 96 Upper Ver Valley**, as illustrated on **Figure 2: Landscape Character** at **Appendix A**. The key characteristics of these areas are summarised below.
- 3.1.14 LCA 94 Buncefield Plateau and LCA 124 Gaddesden Row have not been included in the baseline as any potential for likely effects would be negligible, due to the distance from the Site, extent of intervening landform and vegetation and / or lack of intervisibility with and influence by the Site.

#### ***LCA 95 Revel End Plateau***

The northern part of the Site is located within 'LCA 95 Revel End Plateau', described as "an area of gently undulating upland with a continuous field pattern bordering the M1 Corridor".

Key characteristics and distinctive features relevant to the Site and its local context include the following:

- *Predominantly arable farmland;*
- *Discreet woodland blocks;*
- *Urban fringe recreation;*
- *M1 transport corridor;*
- *Gently undulating upland and slopes;*
- *Urban fringe land uses including pasture;*
- *Isolated scattered farmsteads;*
- *Field copses;*
- *Overhead power lines; and*
- *Great and Little Revel End farms.*

#### ***Proposed Landscape Strategy Objectives – Improve and Conserve***

##### ***Guidelines for Managing Change:***

- *Promote the creation of a network of new medium to large woodlands in the open arable landscape, particularly with a view to visually integrating the intrusive motorways and urban fringe development;*
- *Encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors;*

<sup>2</sup> Hertfordshire County Council (2000), Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment  
BMD.19.036.RP.001

- *Encourage landowners to improve ecological diversity by establishing and maintaining varied land maintenance regimes to enhance visual and wildlife functions;*
- *Promote hedgerow restoration and creation throughout the area to provide visual and ecological links between existing and proposed woodland areas; and*
- *Promote a clear strategy for the visual and noise mitigation of all major roads within the area and to positively integrate these corridors into the local landscape character.*

### **LCA 96 Upper Ver Valley**

The southern part of the Site is located within 'LCA 96 Upper Ver Valley' described as "a broad, open river valley with gentle slopes and extensive views". Key characteristics and distinctive features relevant to the Site and its local context include the following:

- *Narrow strip of wetland habitats along valley floor south of Redbourn;*
- *Cultural pattern and historic settlements follows the line of the river;*
- *Open, gently undulating valley slopes;*
- *Large arable fields;*
- *Discrete woodland blocks to north of the area;*
- *Isolated settlement;*
- *Lack of field boundaries on valley slopes;*
- *Hedge banks along lanes crossing slopes; and*
- *Pockets of pasture along urban edges and the dry valley between Redbourn and Hemel Hempstead.*

### **Proposed Landscape Strategy Objectives – Conserve and Strengthen**

#### **Guidelines for Managing Change:**

- *Encourage the reversal of habitat fragmentation and the creation and improvement of habitat links to create eco-corridors;*
- *Promote a clear strategy for the visual and noise mitigation of motorways and trunk roads and positively integrate these corridors into the local landscape character;*
- *Encourage reversion from arable uses to pasture and grassland;*
- *Restore and enhance wet grassland to provide a habitat for wading birds; and*
- *Promote the re-introduction of permanent pasture and flooding regimes as normal agricultural practices, to increase landscape and habitat diversity.*

### **Current Landscape Features & Character of the Site**

- 3.1.15 Whilst the Site lies within and adjacent to the character areas and types defined by the published landscape character assessments summarised above, and shares some of their characteristics, the published assessments do not consider the nature of the Site and its specific features and context. Differences in landform, land use, landscape structure, degree of visual enclosure and influence of built form creates variation in landscape character and local distinctiveness. A Site-specific review of land uses and characteristics does not involve the application of sensitivity or value, but does assist in exploring the suitability and ability of the landscape to absorb further

change, restoration and enhancement in relation to such matters as condition, scale, relationship with other uses and spatial arrangement. A description of the Site-specific character is given below and should be read in conjunction with the **Viewpoint Photographs** (see **Appendix B**).

### ***Land Use***

- 3.1.16 The Site covers 87.84 hectares and currently features a series of arable fields, bound by the B487 Hemel Hempstead / Redbourn Road to the south, Holtsmere End Lane to the west and north and further arable land to the north and east. Whilst the only built form present on Site is Little Revel End Farm, there is an underground gas main, 400kv overhead pylons and high voltage overhead power lines which all cross the Site on a southeast to northwest axis. The Site is dissected by an unnamed narrow track running east to west between Holtsmere End Lane and the B487 Hemel Hempstead / Redbourn Road, which provides vehicular access to properties at Little Revel End.

### ***Topography***

- 3.1.17 As illustrated by **Figure 5** at **Appendix A**, rolling landform on Site creates a varied, undulating topography, with localised valleys and plateaus in keeping with the landscape characteristics of the area. The northern part of the Site forms a plateau at the highest point (+135m AOD), which gradually falls from the northwest to the south east across the remainder of the Site extents, creating localised high points and valleys, with a low point of +105m AOD along the south eastern boundary. Beyond the Site boundary, the landform rises towards the Chilterns AONB in the north-west and towards the existing settlement of Hemel Hempstead in the south west.

### ***Vegetation***

- 3.1.18 The Site, for the majority, consists of vegetation associated with arable fields with mature field boundary hedgerows and hedgerow trees defining the enclosed field pattern. Mature hedgerows and trees define and visually enclose the Site in a similar manner as the wider rural landscape. In the southern half of the Site, a mature copse of trees runs on a north west to south east axis to form a visual and physical feature that breaks up the arable field. Overall, the Site is relatively enclosed along the western, northern and southern boundaries due to the hedgerow and tree cover. Beyond the Site boundaries, further hedgerow field boundaries and woodland blocks provide the area with an increased degree of enclosure, most notably Hay Wood and woodland associated with the urban edge of Hemel Hempstead.

### ***Hydrology***

- 3.1.19 As illustrated by **Figure 4** at **Appendix A**, there are no water bodies or field drainage features on the Site. The nearest body of water is a reservoir located on the settlement edge of Hemel Hempstead at The Nickey Line, c.400m from the Site's southern boundary.

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***Public Access & Rights of Way***

- 3.1.20 As illustrated by **Figure 4** at **Appendix A**, public access to the Site is limited to a footpath (Redbourn 011), that crosses the northern extents of the Site on an east – west axis. There are a further four public footpaths that lie in close proximity to the Site, these comprise:
- Great Gaddeston 048 to the west, providing links from the settlement edge of Hemel Hempstead to the Site's western boundary;
  - Redbourn 010 located on a northwest to south east axis abutting the eastern boundary;
  - Redbourn 009 located on an east – west axis providing links from the eastern Site boundary towards Redbourn;
  - Redbourn 013 connecting to the Nickey Line (National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 57) providing links from the Site boundary southwards towards east Hemel Hempstead.
- 3.1.21 The Nickey Line is a disused railway line which lies 200m south of the Site, forming a long-distance footpath and NCN Route 57, connecting Hemel Hempstead to Redbourn. These public rights of way form a limited network and provide access through the arable landscape connecting a number of wider right of way networks and scattered settlements.

## 4. VISUAL RECEPTORS

4.1.1 An appraisal has been carried out to identify visual receptors that currently share intervisibility with the Site and are of the greatest visual sensitivity to the type of development proposed. These receptors are represented by a series of **Viewpoint Photographs** (see **Appendix B**), the location of which is shown on **Figure 6: Viewpoint Location Plan** (see **Appendix A**). These comprise the following (see also **Figure 4: Access and Water** at **Appendix A**):

- *Viewpoint 1: View from Footpath Redbourn 011 (on site) looking southeast;*
- *Viewpoint 2: View from Bridleway Hemel Hempstead 128;*
- *Viewpoint 3: View from Footpath Redbourn 011 looking west;*
- *Viewpoint 4: View from Long Distance Footpath / NCN 57 Nickey Line*
- *Viewpoint 5: View from Holtsmere Manor;*
- *Viewpoint 6: View from convergence of Bridleway Hemel Hempstead 128 and Great Gaddesden 048;*
- *Viewpoint 7: View from Bridleway Great Gaddesden 047;*
- *Viewpoint 8: View from Footpath Redbourn 009 adjacent to the Aubreys Camp;*
- *Viewpoint 10: View from Bridleway Great Gaddesden 044; and*
- *Viewpoint 11: View from Long Distance Footpath Flamstead 039 Hertfordshire Way.*

4.1.2 The most significant views of the Site are from the immediately adjacent landscape, as viewed from footpath Redbourn 011 (**Viewpoints 1 and 3**). Further partial / filtered views are possible from bridleway Hemel Hempstead 128 (**Viewpoint 2**), from Holtsmere End Lane adjacent to the northern boundary (**Viewpoint 5**) and footpath Great Gaddesden 048 (**Viewpoint 6**) within the wider landscape to the west / north - west.

4.1.3 Views from the immediate landscape to the north, east and west would see the Proposed Development set amongst existing mature vegetation to the Site boundary. This would provide screening and softening of the development upon completion. Further mitigation would be achieved through sensitive layout design, making use of existing topography and structural landscape planting within and along the Site boundaries, especially to the eastern boundary. Views from the south along the Long Distance Footpath, Nickey Line (**Viewpoint 4**) are oblique and screening is provided towards the Proposed Development by mature vegetated hedgerows and trees along the footpath.

4.1.4 Due to the undulating landform and presence of intervening field boundary and woodland vegetation, views are limited to locations within 1km of the Site, with the Site being well contained without any significant visual links to nearby receptors or landscape sensitivities. Where the Site is clearly visible (**Viewpoints 1 and 3**) and partially visible (**Viewpoints 2, 5 and 6**), the proposed design will need to respond to this to ensure the impact on these receptors is mitigated through design of a sensitive layout and structural landscape planting within and on the Site's boundaries, especially the eastern boundary (**Viewpoint 3**) and northern boundary (**Viewpoint 5**).



## **5. GREEN BELT**

- 5.1.1 Consideration has been given to how the Site performs in relation to the five purposes of the Green Belt as outlined within the NPPF (February 2019). A separate standalone Green Belt Review has been produced (BMD.19.036.RP.003) which should be read alongside the findings and recommendations of this LVA. The below is a summary of the key themes of the Green Belt Review.
- 5.1.2 Whilst the Site is currently designated under the St Albans adopted Local Plan Policy 1 as Green Belt, the emerging new local plan designates the Site as a 'Broad Location for Development' (North Hemel Hempstead) where exceptional circumstances required to justify the release of the Site from the Green Belt for development exist, as set out in Policy S6 and identified on the policies map on **Figure 3 Environmental Policy and Planning Designations** at **Appendix A**.
- 5.1.3 Following the baseline study of landscape character and visual amenity and on consideration of the findings, a Landscape Strategy Plan has been produced (see **Figure 7** at **Appendix A**) which illustrates the opportunities and constraints and summarises the recommendations of the LVA (which are outlined in Section 6 below). Elements of the Landscape Strategy have been integral to the iterative design process used in the shaping of the Conceptual Masterplan Framework and the Landscape Strategy has been considered in forming the judgements derived as part of the Green Belt Review.

### ***Check unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas***

- 5.1.4 The existing on Site pylons would provide a clearly defined and distinct boundary to the Green Belt in this location - with a proposed wooded edge as part of a new Country Park along the eastern boundary forming a clear and defensible permanent buffer to Redbourn. The Site currently performs a limited role in preventing unrestricted sprawl and therefore, release of 67.40ha of the Site from the Green Belt would not undermine this Green Belt principle. Proposed mitigation measures outlined within the recommendations as part of this LVA will ensure that the new Green Belt boundary would support this purpose in the long term, as illustrated in **Figure 003 Landscape Mitigation Plan** within the Green Belt Review Technical Note.

### ***Preventing neighbouring towns merging into one another***

- 5.1.5 The Site does not occupy a crucial position in the wider Green Belt context and makes a limited contribution to this Green Belt purpose. Whilst the revision of the Green Belt boundary will slightly reduce the gap between Hemel Hempstead and Redbourn - intervening landform, valley character, dense vegetation and the M1 motorway retain a significant degree of perceptual and physical separation between the two settlements. There will be no reduction of the gap between Hemel Hempstead and St Albans as a result of the Green belt boundary revision.

### ***Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment***

- 5.1.6 The landscape and visual analysis undertaken as part of this LVA has determined that the Site is physically and visually separated from the prevailing countryside to the north and to a large

extent, the east. This is due to existing vegetation along the Site boundaries, undulating landform and visually detracting features such as the 400kv pylons found on and adjacent to the Site. The removal of the Site from the Green Belt would lead to a negligible degree of perceived encroachment into the countryside due to the high degree of visual containment and would not therefore undermine this Green Belt purpose.

***Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns***

- 5.1.7 Removal of 67.40ha of the Green Belt designation from the Site would not impact upon the existing setting and character of Conservation Areas in Hemel Hempstead and Redbourn due to the appreciable distance of these designated areas from the Site and the extent of intervening vegetation and landform. As proposed within the Conceptual Masterplan, development on the Site will need to be appropriately located to minimise any effects on adjacent Listed Buildings, with sufficient landscape buffers and woodland planting along the northern and eastern boundaries to preserve their existing setting. There would be no effects on historic towns as a result of removing the Site from the Green Belt.

***To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict land and other urban land***

- 5.1.8 There is little derelict or other previously developed land available in Hemel Hempstead to allow for regeneration and few opportunities for infilling. Hemel Hempstead's housing requirement cannot be met by land already within the settlement boundary. Urban development should therefore be channelled towards urban areas around Hemel Hempstead in line with the Hemel Garden Communities Charter vision area as a sustainable pattern of development.

***Conclusion***

- 5.1.9 The Green Belt Review provides a more fine-grained assessment of the North Hemel Hempstead Site against the Green Belt purposes and consideration of the potential capacity to accommodate development without unduly compromising the purposes of the Green Belt, as the Green Belt studies commissioned by St Albans City and District Council did not fully represent the North Hemel Hempstead Broad Location Site, as the Site formed less than 15% of the total wider strategic land area assessed under GB16B.
- 5.1.10 The Green Belt Review has determined that the St Albans City and District Council housing requirement cannot be met through the recycling of derelict land or other land within the urban areas and outside of the Green Belt. As a result, there are exceptional circumstances that justify the release of the land from the Green Belt in order to fulfil future housing requirements for the District. The proposed Green Belt Boundary has been informed through the promotion of sustainable patterns of development around Hemel Hempstead, demonstrating how the release of 67.40ha from the North Hemel Hempstead Broad Location Site from the Green Belt would not compromise the purposes and effectiveness of the Green Belt.

- 5.1.11 The proposed Green Belt boundary would create a permanent landscape buffer, featuring green infrastructure in the form of new woodland planting, improvements to biodiversity, habitat connectivity, new and enhanced walking and cycling routes and improved access to the countryside

## 6. DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1.1 The landscape attributes within the Site and study area present a range of constraints and opportunities to maximise the quality of development proposals. These arise from existing features, the landscape / visual context and requirements of planning policy. This section should be read in conjunction with the Landscape Strategy Plan that supports this LVA (see **Figure 7** at **Appendix A**).

### *Emerging Policy requirements*

- 6.1.2 The Site is being brought forward under the North Hemel Hempstead Broad Location Policy S6 of the emerging St Albans & City Local Plan 2020 – 2036 and therefore is considered against the policies and requirements of the emerging Local Plan, rather than the existing saved policies from the City and District of St Albans Local Plan Review, 1994. The recommendations and policies that relate to the Site are as follows:

**Recommendation 1:** Locate the developable areas and higher densities towards the existing settlement edge of Hemel Hempstead in the west. Development should be set back from the Site's eastern boundary behind a sufficient landscape buffer and woodland planting to respect the rural landscape in the east, existing listed buildings at Great Revel End Farm and to define a new defensible Green Belt boundary. Relate the character of the proposed open spaces to the existing landscape character assessments for the site in terms of guidelines for managing change.

Emerging Policy S6 iv seeks the retention of significant trees and landscape features, such as hedgerows, as part of the development proposals unless it can be shown that retention is incompatible with the overall design quality of the Site. Policy S6 iv also seeks the addition of large-scale buffer planting to site boundaries where appropriate to visually soften built form in views and the introduction of wildlife corridors where opportunities exist.

**Recommendation 2:** The retention / use of existing natural on-site features and planting along all site boundaries and within the site extents including but not limited to hedgerows and tree belts, and suitable site layout design - supported by an appropriate landscape and planting scheme.

**Recommendation 3:** Include areas for biodiversity enhancement, which we recommend should comprise areas of native woodland, tree and shrub planting to the site boundary, with species rich grassland created within all open areas where possible.

Emerging Policy S6 iv aims to improve access to the countryside through improvements to off road paths (rights of way).

**Recommendation 4:** The development proposals must retain and incorporate the existing public footpath (Redbourn 011). Permanent diversions will be acceptable only if they compare favourably with the original route.

Emerging policy S2 responds to the local housing need and creating the exceptional circumstances that necessitate major development in locations previously designated as Green Belt. The Site is currently designated Green Belt in adopted Local Plan Policy S1, however under the emerging Local Plan, the Site is designated as 'Broad Location' under policy S6 where exceptional circumstances exist for Green Belt release.

Emerging policy S6 identifies a series of "Broad Locations" for development to contribute to meeting housing needs over the plan period. Planning applications for development at the Broad Locations must materially accord with the specific policies for each Broad Location, which in relation to the Site is policy S6 iv North Hemel Hempstead Broad Location.

**Recommendation 5:** Future development proposals for the Site must accord with the Site specific policies under policy S6 iv North Hemel Hempstead. With regard to landscape: include the provision of strategic and local public open space, including woodland and ecological links; provide links and extension to a substantial new Country Park on East Hemel Hempstead site, providing a permanent green buffer to Redbourn and the retention of important trees and landscape features.

Emerging policy L23 requires all new development to be well designed and must respond positively to environmental content, reflecting landscape character and adjoining urban structure and growth. Proposed development should take account of its landscape context with regard to emerging policy L29 – Green and Blue Infrastructure.

**Recommendation 6:** New development proposals for the North Hemel Hempstead Broad Location (the Site) must incorporate and respond to the emerging proposals for East Hemel Hempstead Northern Country Park. In accordance with emerging policy, a net gain in biodiversity should be achieved on Site. As the site is located on existing arable land, a detailed survey of the agricultural land quality should be undertaken to assess the agricultural land grade. Existing woodlands, trees and landscape features should be retained and protected as part of the proposed development.

Emerging policy L28 provides guidance on the green space standard and green space provision required in the case of new housing development.

**Recommendation 7:** The proposed development must demonstrate and incorporate the provision of new green space in accordance with the quality and accessibility standards, based on the predicted population yield. Priority provision for the Broad Location at North Hemel Hempstead (the Site) is for strategic play, teenage areas, parks and gardens, adult and junior football pitches and allotments.

### ***Layout and Scale***

Proposals for the Site need to consider policy, with reference to emerging policy S6 iv and local landscape character assessment guidance. The main considerations are therefore the location of development within the Site and being of an appropriate scale, density and location to

minimise the impact on the wider landscape. Therefore, the proposals for the Site should include the following:

**Recommendation 8:** The location, scale and density of the of the proposed development should reflect existing residential development within Hemel Hempstead and the existing landscape context, generally concentrating higher density development towards the south western corner of the Site and transition appropriately with the existing settlement edge of Hemel Hempstead out towards the countryside. Lower density development should be concentrated on the development's northern and eastern outer edges where it interfaces with the areas of proposed green infrastructure in these directions.

The proposed development must meet the requirements set out in Emerging Policy S6 iv to meet the required overall minimum net density of 40dph, which will comprise areas of varying density development (as is suitable and sustainable to their location within the Conceptual Masterplan Framework such as within the proposed mixed-use local centre.

**Recommendation 9:** Existing landscape and infrastructure features should be retained and utilised to define the new settlement and Green Belt boundary. The overhead powerlines on the eastern boundary should define the extent of built form development with the provision of public open space and landscape buffer planting beyond to the east, to provide a strong landscape and physical boundary to assimilate the built form into the landscape. Development should also be set back behind a proposed landscape buffer, ensuring a sufficient offset along the eastern and northern boundaries to respect and conserve the setting of the nearby Grade II listed buildings at Great Revel End Farm and Holtsmere Manor.

**Recommendation 10:** The proposed development should utilise existing landform and respond to the plateau and valley characters of the Site, orientating the alignment of the built form and roads along the contours. Development should be orientated to face out onto the proposed green infrastructure corridors, public open spaces and along the boundaries of the Site to address the existing landscape setting, forming a positive edge to the Site. Strengthening of existing vegetated boundary edges through additional landscape buffer planting, woodland planting and public open space provision to assimilate the proposed development and define a new Green Belt boundary.

**Recommendation 11:** SuDS should be integrated into the landscape strategy where possible, to include above ground systems such as ponds and swales, maximising their contribution to biodiversity / wildlife habitat and landscape character / identity of the new development.

**Recommendation 12:** Publicly accessible parkland should be provided in the south eastern corner of the Site in order to contribute to and form part of a wider open space green infrastructure network with the proposed East Hemel Hempstead Country Park to the south, connecting through the Site, towards wider onward connections to the Chilterns AONB.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

- 7.1.1 This LVA has considered: relevant planning policy; the content and recommendations of published landscape character assessments; the existing features and character of the Site; and, views toward the Site and Proposed North Hemel Hempstead Development.
- 7.1.2 In consideration of the above, the LVA has identified opportunities and constraints for the Proposed Development and has outlined a series of Recommendations to maximise these opportunities for assimilating the development into the landscape and minimising its impact on surrounding views.
- 7.1.3 Assuming the design recommendations of this LVA are adopted in the design of the proposed development and integrated into its landscape strategy, it is considered that:
- the Site would have the capacity to accommodate the Proposed Development in accordance with the requirements of Policy S6 iv of the St Albans Local Plan 2020-2036 Publication Draft;
  - the integrity of the landscape character surrounding the Site would be conserved and enhanced by the strengthening of boundary features and integration of native biodiversity enhancements as part of the landscape strategy in accordance with the requirements of Policy S6 iv and L29 of the St Albans Local Plan 2020-2036 Publication Draft;
  - existing landform, built development and vegetation significantly limit views to and from the immediate landscape;
  - the impact on views from the immediate surrounding area would be mitigated from the outset by the retention and strengthening of existing and proposed vegetation around the boundaries of the Site. It is therefore considered that any impacts on the visual amenity are likely to be negligible at most.
- 7.1.4 With regards to the release of the Site from the Green Belt, pending the landscape mitigation measures are adhered to and that the above considerations are met, it is determined that:
- the existing 400kv pylons reinforced by the proposed new Country Park and landscape mitigation would provide a permanent, defensible and long term new Green Belt boundary along the Site's eastern edge.
  - the Site does not occupy a crucial position in the wider Green Belt context and makes a limited contribution in preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another.
  - the Site is physically and visually separated from the prevailing countryside due to existing vegetation along the Site boundaries, undulating landform and visually detracting features such as the 400kv pylons found on and adjacent to the Site.
  - removal of 67.40ha of the Green Belt designation from the Site would not impact upon the existing setting and character of Conservation Areas in Hemel Hempstead and Redbourn.
  - there is little derelict or other previously developed land available in Hemel Hempstead to allow for regeneration and few opportunities for infilling.

## **APPENDICES**

APPENDIX A – BASELINE FIGURES

APPENDIX B – VIEWPOINT PHOTOGRAPHS



**A. BASELINE FIGURES**

## **B. VIEWPOINT PHOTOGRAPHS**

